

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 11, 2020

Robert C. O'Brien  
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Amb. O'Brien,

We are writing to you as members of the House Armed Services Committee and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence to share our support for the Administration's review of the national security risks posed by the Treaty on Open Skies and to urge the Administration to withdraw from that agreement. We believe the record is clear that Russia exploits the treaty to undermine the safety and security of the American people. There are more cost-effective and less risky means for U.S. allies to obtain whatever benefits they receive from the treaty.

We strongly support the Administration's months-long review to examine the risks and benefits to U.S. national security of remaining in the Treaty on Open Skies. Administration officials have discussed the risks created by the treaty. For example, former Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lt. Gen. Vince Stewart, USMC, testified that "[t]he things that you can see, the amount of data you can collect, the things you can do with post-processing, allows Russia, in my opinion, to get incredible foundational intelligence on critical infrastructure, bases, ports, all of our facilities...[s]o from my perspective, it gives them a significant advantage."

As you know, the Russian Federation used an overflight in 2017 to fly over the White House, as well as President Trump's New Jersey home at low altitude with an electro-optical sensor. That flight was an unprecedented and provocative display of how Russia may decide to use the treaty to threaten the continuity of the President.

These security risks, along with the fact that Russia has not been in compliance with the treaty for years, are among the reasons why we support the United States withdrawing from the treaty at the earliest opportunity. We urge you to reject calls for further delay that appear to be calculated only to ensure the ability of a potential future Administration to reverse course.

We are aware that some allies express support for the treaty because of the insights it provides them in lieu of the elaborate National Technical Means that the United States government possesses. But we also understand that our allies could obtain the same, if not better, imagery from commercial providers at a much lower cost. For example, we understand the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency recently determined that for approximately \$1 million per country, our allies who are party to the treaty could obtain almost unlimited access to high-resolution commercial imagery.

This route would result in substantial savings for many of our allies, would benefit U.S. commercial imagery companies, and could even count towards allies' defense burden-sharing commitments. Significantly for the United States, when it is not a party to the treaty, the Department of Defense will no longer have to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to recapitalize treaty infrastructure such as aircraft and sensors. The Department can better employ 400 DOD personnel in furtherance of the National Defense Strategy, and it can save tens of millions of dollars in annual operations and maintenance.

As the Administration comes to the conclusion of its review process about the future of the Treaty on Open Skies, we would like to assure you of our support for a decision to withdraw the United States from the treaty. While we strongly believe in maintaining strong and enduring relationships with our allies who support the treaty, we believe America's national security interest is clearly in favor of withdrawal at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,



Liz Cheney  
Member of Congress



Michael R. Turner  
Member of Congress



Doug Lamborn  
Member of Congress



Joe Wilson  
Member of Congress



Brad R. Wenstrup, D. P. M.  
Member of Congress

CC: Dr. Mark T. Esper, Secretary of Defense  
Mr. Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State  
Mr. Christopher Wray, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Amb. Richard Grenell, Acting Director of National Intelligence  
Mr. Mick Mulvaney, Acting White House Chief of Staff  
White House Military Office